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ABSTRACT

The author notes the lack of geography courses offered in international educational programs and suggests that geographers work toward correcting the deficiency. Suggestions include becoming informed about international education, volunteering for exchanges, offering to team teach with historians, and creating relevant courses. Planning for the unexpected is also essential. (KC)

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THE ORGANIZATION, PREPARATION, AND PRESENTATION OF A COURSE OR PROGRAM IN A FOREIGN ENVIRONMENT

by

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I recently took a continuing education course on how to write the most boring speech, lecture, or professional paper possible. The first half of the course was devoted to the practice of selecting the most uninteresting titles imaginable. I felt I had done a rather remarkable job but, in spite of my best effort, I see some of you are insistent upon weathering the frontal assault launched by this blase mundane title. Therefore, without further ado, and with our peripli firmly in hand, let us begin our discussion of how to organize and obtain a free trip to "Gay Paree" or any other mythical land of love, adventure, and a summer of leisure while hiding from the bothersome students the friendly travel agent insisted we recruit before receiving our all-expenses-paid vacation.

All of us have seen the fancy brochures with statements like, See the Soviet Union in seven sunny fun-filled days while earning 6 semester hours of graduate credit. Some of these programs are legitimate, but in the past too many have been poorly organized, needlessly expensive, academically mediocre, and generally an overall disappointment to many participants. The questions are then:

1) How can we create new courses, programs and study abroad opportunities that are well organized, academically stimulating, and reasonably inexpensive?

2) How can we as geographers become more actively and relevantly involved in existing programs?

Relationships between international education and geography are intuitively accepted, but have been given limited examination and academic research. In the past the main reason for studying abroad was to develop a better knowledge of the language and literature of the country, now students are asking for more. Ernest L. Boyer, past Commissioner of Education for the U.S.A., has created a "Global Perspective Task Force." The stated objective of the Task Force was "to help raise the level of public awareness and understanding of the realities of global interdependence and the implication for citizenship in the modern world, through a variety of continuing education and non-traditional programs."[1] We have been forced into an era of complete global interdependence. International studies programs, after varied and relatively vigorous development in the sixties, are confronted in the present decade by financial and organizational crisis.

In view of America's rising world commitments, the current dilemma is both paradoxical and distressing. It is equally disturbing to note the lack of involvement by geographers in international studies programs and the lack of emphasis upon geography in most of these programs. Less than one percent of the college-age group in the United States is enrolled in any course which specifically teaches about international issues. Of the twenty-four "Study

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[1] Boyer, Ernest L. "A Global Perspective: The New Imperative." Today's Education, 67, #4, (November-December, 1978), 69-70.

Abroad Programs" offered by the Pennsylvania Consortium for International Education in 1978, not one was offered by a Department of Geography, a professor of geography, or with a course title which indicates a geographical study. Geographers have as much, if not more, to offer international studies and study abroad programs than any other single group of academicians.

But as a group, we geographers suffer from a poor press, past and present. The image which the very term geography creates in most people's minds is not very complimentary to geographers. Modern man, when asked to describe geography, would probably reply: "It is a subject I had to study in the seventh and ninth grades" or "It is a boring grade school subject which included memorizing lots of facts like capitals, states, crops, etc." Frequently students remember "the coach" showing film strips of distant lands and naked savages. Another common occurrence was the "guest lecturer" who came and showed slides of his/her latest trip down the "Beautiful Blue Danube." Travel and geography are often assumed to be one and the same. A comprehensive study conducted in 1958 by the Institute of Research on Overseas Programs at Michigan State University revealed one very amazing fact.[2] Not one college or university listed geography as the subject matter field for any of their programs. Geography may have been included under other titles such as social studies but the fact remains that it was the only subject in the modern curriculum not singled out: History, anthropology, law, political science, religion, music, theatre, art, economics, business, engineering, biology, chemistry, physics, medicine, sports, health education, special education, home economics, agriculture, forestry, geology, astronomy, and even mortuary science, but not geography. Equally as amazing as its omission is the fact that the authors never even felt a need to mention the subject. Another recent study revealed that students majoring in International Studies, International Education, and Area Studies are seldom required to take more than three semester hours of geography. Harvard University has 72 international education opportunities for students covering all six inhabited continents and the university doesn't have a geography department or even a course entitled Geography of _____.

So geographers often believe that geography is being taught under new titles such as international studies, urban and regional studies, environmental science, regional science, land use studies and world cultures. During the summer of 1950 UNESCO organized an international seminar on the Teaching of Geography. The subject of study, "The Teaching of Geography as a Means of Developing International Understanding," was chosen by UNESCO in the belief that the content of geography could have a particular value in helping to equip students for life in the then increasingly interdependent world.[3] In 1961 a high-level committee representing government, industry, the various

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[2] The International Programs of American Universities, Institute of Research on Overseas Programs, Michigan State University, East Langing, Michigan, 1958, pp. 323.

[3] A Handbook of Suggestions on the Teaching of Geography: Towards World Understanding UNESCO - Paris, 1950, page 7.

foundations and higher education reviewed the situation. The committee's widely circulated report, The University and World Affairs, noted with satisfaction the campus boom in international matters.[4]

The February 1978 report on International Linkages in Higher Education: A Feasibility Study contains the following assertion: "There is emerging general agreement among American citizens that the U.S. is and will remain a world power and that the future of the Republic depends on international as well as domestic development. This consensus is clearer now than ever before and there is a growing tendency to think about developing as well as developed countries in considering the years ahead. Since learning looms large in the American scale of values, nearly everyone now assumes that elementary and advanced schooling, including the education of adults, must not omit the international dimension and that research and service...the handmaidens of teaching... must also take on global perspectives."[5] All of this emphasis on the rest of the world would seem to be the perfect opportunity for geographers to step forward as leaders in the global academic community. I believe it is our opportunity to advance our academic area and our nation's understanding of itself and its relationship to the world. As Abraham Lincoln said: "To correct the evils, great and small, which spring from want of sympathy and from positive enmity among strangers, as nations or as individuals, is one of the highest functions of civilization."[6] So what can we as geographers do?

First and foremost--get involved. Become informed about international education and the opportunities available at your university and in your state. Next, begin planning and preparing courses. Volunteer for all the exchanges you receive information about. If your campus is typical according to a 1976 report on area studies, international education and study abroad published by the American Academy of Political and Social Science, you will be greatly outnumbered by professors from other academic areas--especially history and political science.[7] For example, a study conducted by the Pennsylvania Council for International Education (PaCIE) in 1973 found that almost two-thirds or 63% of the courses are history courses, regardless of world area.[8] If we include political science, we get 83% of the courses.[9] Actually then, at least in Pennsylvania, when we talk about international studies, we are essentially talking about history and political science. The present

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[4] "International Linkages in Higher Education: A Feasibility Study," sponsored by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, et. al., (February, 1978), pp. 42.

[5] Ibid, pg. 7.

[6] Abraham Lincoln.

[7] "International Exchange of Persons: A Reassessment." The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 424 (March, 1976).

[8] "The Content of Area Studies and Thematic International Offerings in Pennsylvania," Pennsylvania Council for International Education, Gettysburg, Pa. (Nov. 1973), pp. 3.

[9] Ibid, Pg. 4.

participants are and will remain very territorial so you will often face an uphill battle. Martin Luther King once said, "Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers...."[10] You will need everyone's support regardless of their academic preparation. Geography and Geographers must seek to be and become a co-area and co-workers with the entire academic and administrative community. Administrators (Academic Vice Presidents, Deans of Education and Arts and Science, and Directors of Continuing and International Education) must be convinced of the contribution that geography courses and geographers can make in and to area studies and International Education. The foreign languages and social scientists are your most logical allies. Suggest team-teaching with the historian traveling abroad with the group the first year and a geographer going the following year. Learn to wheel and deal so to speak. Decide where you want to go and what you want to teach while you are there. Make the course descriptions interesting, relevant, even exciting and enjoyable, but still insist on quality. At some point in his enormously prolific writing, Aristotle had occasion to observe, "No wind is favorable for a ship that knoweth not its destination." Plot your course and set sail this year.

The real secret of success in teaching an overseas course is in the planning. Your travel from here to Mexico City necessitated some planning on your part and the successful planning of the meeting has constituted numerous hours by the committee members involved. Student participation requires even more planning and the first rule is to assume that Murphy's Law will prevail--"If it can go wrong it will," and frequently does. Therefore, the second rule is to expect the unexpected and be flexible. The third rule is patience spelled with all capital letters. The fourth rule is to always take an abundance of money with you. It is often difficult to get money from home and credit cards are not to be relied upon in many parts of the world. Prepare for emergencies such as student illness, death in someone's family, arrests by local authorities, and the list could continue. As the professor-in-charge or field director, as the case may be, you are on call twenty-four hours per day, seven days a week. You often need to act as a father or mother substitute, clergyman, counselor, and banker, to name only a few of your possible roles. So, remember, you must have money enough to cover all possible situations--in reason of course. The major point is that the experience will, in all probability, cost you money. The fifth and final rule is to always, regardless of the time of day or night, or the situation, always smile. If you,as a geographer, become involved in International Education and you follow these five simple rules, you can feel confident that you will receive one of the best experiences of your lifetime.

As the old Chinese proverb tells us, the horse and the cart are not two, but three...the horse, the cart, and the two together. Geography and International Education will become not two but three--Geography, International Education, and the unity of two of nature's most perfect and natural partners, and you will see the world as it really is, in all the beauty and diversity of its "oneness."

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[10] Martin Luther King, exact source unknown.